

ArtNexus

No. 90 Volume 12 Year 2013



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Iole de Freitas

The Venice Biennale • Iván Contreras-Brunet

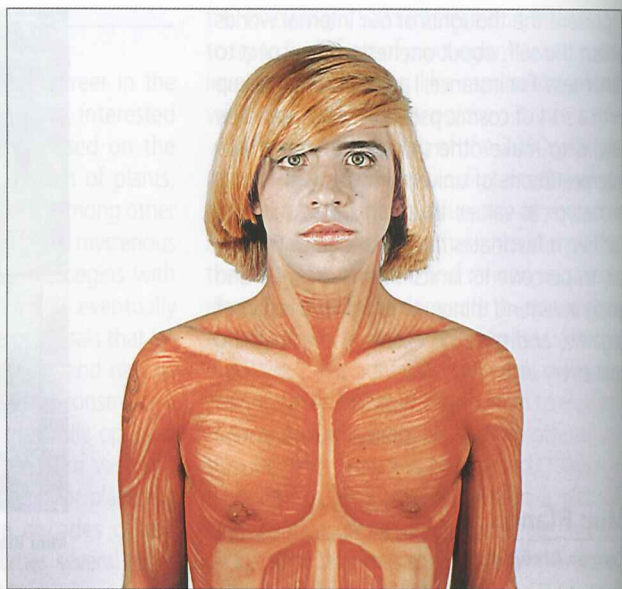
Visual Arts Biennial of the Isthmus • Omar Rayo

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Pablo Siquier. *1308*, 2013. Carbon steel. 9,84 x 7,87 x 11,81 feet. (300 x 240 x 360 cm.).



Juan Pablo Echeverri. *MUTILady 4*, 2003. Wood mounted photograph, digital print. 12 ½ x 12 ½ in. (32 x 32 cm.). Edition: 5.

HOUSTON / TEXAS

Pablo Siquier

Sicardi Gallery

There are artists who defy classification. Pablo Siquier is one of them. The literature on the wake of his works describes them as both figurative and abstract. Indeed, some of his earlier works bear a resemblance to deco architectural motifs, while some others, to peculiar urban cartographies and electronic circuitry. At first impression the viewer might also see in his oeuvre some resemblance to the work of artists who have explored geometry for its own sake, or for the production of movement and perceptual titillation. Indeed, many of his works use the lessons of Gestalt psychology about how certain black-and-white forms are perceived as background and/or foreground, mass and shadow. Finally, although many of his works are abstract, in the sense that they do not have a referent other than themselves, it is a moot point whether his latest ones are.

What is certain about his works is that there is a method to his madness, a reason to his rhyme: hence, the words "algorithm" and "obsession" in the title. The former is a term typically used in mathematics to denote a process or set of rules to be followed in problem-solving operations. In Siquier's case, the repetition and generation of geometric forms often occur with the aid of a computer. Even in Siquier's Rorschach symmetries and

controlled asymmetric doodles, there seem to be recursive rules to extend a pattern. On the other hand, his technique is meticulously, one might even say, obsessively precise.

Structure, Siquier's recent exhibit at Sicardi Gallery (Houston) consists of basically two main works: a sculptural piece and a nine-foot tall mural drawing. The sculptural piece titled *1308* is an intricate construction of steel rods that resembles the structure of a building to be, or one gutted by a natural or artificial disaster. A local critic described it as "cage-like" and compared it to Donald Judd's minimalist boxes. However, the extravagance of *1308* is more baroque than minimalist, and in spite of an external resemblance, lacks one of the fundamental traits of a cage; namely, an empty caging space. However, there is something to that comparison worth pursuing. *1308* has a density of crisscrossing rods that traverse the inner space of the structure. It is more Piranesian than anything resembling Minimalism. Indeed, in the diagonally ascending and descending rods that crowd the inner core of *1308* there is an echo of the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (imaginary prisons) of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778). Of all Piranesi's works it is the sixteen prints of these dark and awe-inspiring *Carceri* that he did between 1745 and 1761 that have most impacted many artists for whom the sublime is more important than beauty. Comparing *1308* to a cage may therefore not be so farfetched after all, because its claustrophobic interior creates a sensation of unease similar to the one resulting from Piranesi's *Carceri*.

1301, the charcoal drawing on the wall, is a mural with an ephemeral material existence. Its image persists in the computer-generated file from which Siquier projects it onto a wall before he traces it with a charcoal stick. It will stay there until the wall is cleared up for the next exhibit. Eventually, it may reincarnate on a different wall. Thus *1301* has a dual ontological status: a virtual one as a computer file that endures, and a material one executed by the hand of the artist or one of his accomplices. Its labyrinthine structure is obsessively symmetrical except for one inner rod. It is not abstract, nor non-denotative; what happens is that it represents something that has no name. *1301* could very well be the design for the next tri-dimensional structure, in which case the latter becomes its referent.

In parting, it is worth mentioning Pablo Siquier's two murals at Los Molinos Building in Puerto Madero (2008), his largest work to date. It suggests a context for the kind of setting his works may engage. These murals have the apparent symmetry of a Rorschach blot and the look of an aerial photograph of a city. However, upon careful scrutiny there is no such symmetry and no representation of a city. The symmetry is broken by the fact that one side of the drawings is hit by "light" coming from the right and casting shadows on the left. In fact, when everything in a work is working out into some kind of perfect symmetry, Siquier finds a subtle or not-so-subtle way to disturb it. A notable difference in the two murals of Los Molinos is that one uses

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curving, wavy lines, while the other is made up solely of straight lines. Puerto Madero is an ideal setting for Siquier's works because it is the newest and most thriving part of the city. An area which has been built on the remains of something that was there before. Its modern and postmodern architecture is a perfect correlate to Siquier's deceptively modern oeuvre.

Fernando Castro R.

MADRID / SPAIN

Juan Pablo Echeverri

La Fresh Gallery (Madrid)
CIS Art Lodgers (Barcelona)

Juan Pablo Echeverri is, without a doubt, a true transvestite. And he is a true transvestite inasmuch as his discourse activates the resorts—always apotheotic, always extended—of the culture of the spectacle and the carnival of multiple, patchwork identities. His work, intelligent, bold, and fun, *subjetivizes* each and every one of the states of "appearance." Everything is possible, nothing is definitive: the given lies, mocks its status as truth, like identity itself as it mutates, like the face that shifts and ensures for itself the cubism of a visuality that is inscribed on the thicket of literary texts abducted by the baroque impulse. Resulting from this torsion he introduces into the play of mirrors is a kind of imperialism and tyranny with respect to that "natural" context implied in the everyday image, the image the mirror shoots back to us in the morning. If, as Severo Sarduy noted, "in the baroque *the signifier* is always erect, always aroused" ¹, in Echeverri's transvestite snapshots it is *the referent* (his own visage) that is always on the prowl for desire, searching for its sublimating and seductive functions. In this way, the work signals the true-to-life—yet deceitful—passage from neurosis (when he has what he wants, he stops wanting it) to psychosis (which goes from homicide to suicide). In this way, the performance never ends. The subject transforms time and again into a masturbatory delirium and the desire for restitution/death. From such ambiguity of the signifier altered ad infinitum in its narrative potential, from this unsheathed passion for the conquering of the expanded cubism of appearances, the work is born as a cult of the *eternal nightmare* of correction and cosmetics.

Echeverri's two recent solo exhibitions in Spain, curated by Alex Brahmin in Madrid (*yosoytuereleseella*, at Fresh Gallery) and

Barcelona (*todo x el pelos*, at CIS Art Lodgers), trace the outline of a physical indestructibility—vulnerable in the end—that boasts of a critical delectation in simulacra. Without any debatable disparity in method, both exhibitions, each in its way, revealed the boldness of a speculative and potentially playful essay in which the subject of truth is the alibi of all kinds of deceit. Both traced the persuasive and anything but discreet writing of the trajectory in which *self-representation* becomes the result of the fiction of the contemporary drama of an identity requiring the wild cards of gender, passports, assumption of the notions of race, nationality, sex, social status. Echeverri's staging implies, then, a licentious and rabidly erotic slap in the face of the hegemonic socio-semiotic narrative that dominates the concurrence of those social and cultural stereotypes charged with constraining the subject's freedom. These photographs believe more in "being" and its exponential diversity than in the "ought to be" of the most rancid modern psychology. Thus their transvestite and transversal character, their taste for juxtaposition and palimpsest, for admixtures and for the seminal orgy that fecundates the image in an infinite logic of delirious multiplications where, in the effort to assert themselves, the dichotomous distances of all Cartesian binaries fail. At their core, in the hermeneutic locus of this essay, opposites commingle as in the baroque banquet of the Americas, which provokes socio-cultural experiences of varying degree and depth. The transvestite image appears then as voyeurism, as an object of desire, of seduction, as an aesthetic pirouette that slakes (or amplifies) the thirst for ambitions of an era when the death of the *ego* has only generated its extended mystification. And it is precisely here that the reassertion of the subject, multiplied in its more radical otherness, must be read as the gesture of a narcissistic and predatory age that needs the figures, as volatile as they are anodyne, of power and prestige.

In this way, Echeverri's work brings forth a particular vision of his own complexity as a tribute to the *ontology of the human*, in dialog with the establishment and consolidation of a *different discursive regime for the subject's identity*. Because of this I think, by virtue of the prodigality of his references and the diversity of his cultural interests, that the greatest lucidity of Echeverri's poetics resides in his own *praxis*, in the way in which it opposes the order of conventions and static classifications, of models and their tyranny. The fact that

we are talking about a Latin American artist, nomadic and on the move like the majority of them, forces us to think also of the dimension of mutability of the very concepts or categories that are discovered, atomized, in his works. This disguise, this game at once fun and dangerous of being everything and nothing at the same time, it is but the nominalization of a cultural paradigm like Latin America's, which has always been exposed to being enunciated and named by others. Clothes, masks, artifices are, then, weapons for attacking—from within the system—this discussion of the centrality of discourses that render is always other, always alternative, always the savage marked by seduction and derision. Let the disguises and cosmetics outwit the image proposed by that mirror. Juan Pablo knows, and knows well, that the ideology of language precedes and determines us. This is where his game, his dance of masks and deceit, comes from. With it and from it we discover an audacious hollowing of the signs of power entrenched in the discourse of domination. In the end, the mask becomes a face.

NOTE

(1) Severo Sarduy. "Farther than the image". Interview with Jacques Henric, published in the *Revolución y Cultura* magazine. (Havana). No. 2, 1998. p. 67.

Andrés Isaac Santana

MÉXICO D.F. / MÉXICO

Miguel Ángel Ríos

Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros

I see a stork arriving from Paris and before I clear the small clouds from my eyes, I use them to count sheep in a dream, sheep that jump a fence to follow the yellow road. Then, one stays on the Berlin border... or, I am not sure, was it perhaps the Great Wall of China? I meditate without crossing the barrier of fluffy walls of whiteness so intense that it beclouds my vision.

I rub my eyes to discover fences and barbed wired bars—hurdles where the need for freedom is present in the remnants of clothing and other fabrics. It is then when I think that the way many countries celebrate their nationalisms depends on the degree of homogeneity among their peoples and that the more homogeneous as a group the more they celebrate their identity equality... But no, I am actually looking at the exhibition *Across the Border* by Miguel Ángel Ríos.